



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 10**

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OFFICE OF  
ECOSYSTEMS, TRIBAL AND  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

November 12, 2014

Jeffery Hammes  
District Ranger  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, Idaho 83204

Re: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency comments on the Pocatello, Midnight, and Michaud Allotment Management Plan Revisions Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EPA Project Number: 14-0006-AFS).

Dear Mr. Hammes:

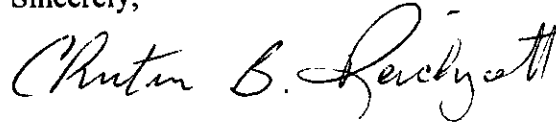
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Allotment Management Plan Revisions on the Westside Ranger District of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Our review was conducted in accordance with EPA responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act (CAA).

The Purpose and Need for the reauthorization is to consider shifts from current grazing management on the three allotments to meet desired conditions for riparian functions, water resources, and recreation. We acknowledge that current grazing is inconsistent with the current Resource Management Plan and that past grazing practices have resulted in degraded bank stability and riparian functions. To address these issues, the Forest proposes to reauthorize livestock grazing on the three allotments and manage livestock grazing to meet or move resources towards the RMP's desired conditions.

The DEIS analyzes a no grazing alternative and three grazing alternatives in areas designated as suitable for grazing with different levels of active management. Alternative 2 is identified as the agency's Proposed Action. The EPA supports the direction of the Proposed Action. Specifically, we support the critical need to remove grazing from municipal watershed protection areas. We also acknowledge the challenges of managing resources to support both recreation and grazing. We believe that the Proposed Action provides a balance by continuing grazing while also maintaining dispersed camping use areas (i.e., 4.3(b)) and reducing resource conflicts between forest users. While we support the overall direction, we have concerns with lack of specificity regarding timing of grazing and with potential impacts to water resources; particularly impaired streams. Therefore, we are rating the DEIS as EC-2 (Environmental Concerns- Insufficient Information). Our recommendations in the attached detailed comments are based on our review of the DEIS and our understanding of forest conditions.

We appreciate the USFS staffs' time hosting the field visit in July so that we could gain an on-the-ground understanding of the allotments. We welcome any discussion or feedback about our recommendations in the attached detailed comments. If you have any questions about our review, please contact me at (206) 553-1601, by electronic mail at [reichgott.christine@epa.gov](mailto:reichgott.christine@epa.gov), or you may contact Lynne Hood of my staff at 208-378-5757 or by electronic mail at [hood.lynne@epa.gov](mailto:hood.lynne@epa.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Christine B. Reichgott".

Christine B. Reichgott, Manager  
Environmental Review and Sediment Management Unit

Enclosure

1. EPA Detailed Comments on the Pocatello, Midnight, and Michaud Allotment Revisions

## **EPA Detailed Comments on the Pocatello, Midnight, and Michaud Allotment Revisions**

### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

Our general comments focus on promoting grazing practices that align with the identified need in the EIS to improve watershed conditions across the allotments.

### **Watershed Conditions**

#### Watershed Protection Area

Portions of the grazing allotments currently being grazed are designated as unsuitable for livestock (e.g., the high-valued, protected municipal watershed for the city of Pocatello). Water quality protection in these areas is essential. Although the area is clearly identified in the RMP as restricted from grazing, the current livestock fence cuts across the protection area in such a way that livestock graze within the protected zone. We support Alternative 2, which proposes to move the fence to enclose the protected watershed. Alternative 3 proposes alternative methods to moving the fence such as salting, herding, and limited fence placement. We believe that moving the fence to enclose the municipal watershed boundary is critical to accomplish the protection level needed for drinking water.

The DEIS includes Appendix A - draft Allotment Management Plan. The proposal for the Midnight Allotment includes either a 10% herbaceous utilization standard for Elk Meadows or a fence realignment in 2015. Again, we strongly recommend that the fence be realigned to protect the municipal watershed. The DEIS and the Appendix do not describe the process or agencies involved in implementing the realignment. We understand that the City of Pocatello would have a role in this process. We recommend that the final EIS include details regarding the process and discuss the effectiveness of implementing this measure. We also encourage the Forest Service to work with the City to develop a plan, which could be implemented in 2015 as proposed.

#### Impaired streams

A number of streams in the project area currently exceed water quality standards for nutrients, sediment, temperature and E. coli, all of which may be affected by grazing. In addition, many of these streams (e.g., East Fork Mink Creek and Gibson Jack) are tributaries to the Portneuf River and Marsh Creek, both of which have numerous documented water quality problems that affect beneficial uses. A Total Maximum Daily Load was approved (1999, 2010) for the Portneuf subbasin. The TMDL includes allocations of pollutant load reductions needed to move water quality towards meeting Idaho water quality standards.

The DEIS provides details regarding streams which are 303(d) listed or have TMDLs in place, and includes their locations within the allotments. However, there is no further mention of these streams in discussions of alternatives, specific management actions, or monitoring parameter thresholds (e.g. bank stability, stubble height, etc.). We recommend that the USFS discuss how each of the alternatives would address these impaired waters, and, since livestock are a known source of the pollutants of concern (sediment, E. coli, nitrogen, phosphorus), identify the need for more stringent management prescriptions within the impaired watersheds.

#### Desired Future Condition

In considering the relative rate of improvement towards desired future conditions, the DEIS ranks Alternative 2 as moderate to high, Alternative 3 as low and Alternative 4 as moderate overall, but high

in riparian areas with declining trends. Alternative 2 involves implementing specific actions while Alternative 3 relies on monitoring and adaptive management. The DEIS states that monitoring has not occurred as specified and that the effectiveness of using effective adaptive management is unclear. We agree with the value of developing a monitoring plan and utilizing adaptive management for any alternative, particularly regarding the timing of moving livestock. However, we would favor an alternative that would best meet the need to improve watershed conditions more directly.

#### Grazing Implementation Guide

The Caribou-Targhee NF has developed the grazing-focused *Riparian Grazing Implementation Guide* (referred to as the GIG) that specifically directs actions related to livestock grazing. As stated in our scoping comments, we are encouraged with the USFS's efforts in this regard, and believe that consistent implementation, ongoing monitoring, and utilizing monitoring results to inform decisions are key to achieve the desired upward trend in resource conditions.

The Executive Summary includes a brief discussion of the Proposed Action and refers to the GIG. However, details regarding connections between the alternatives and the guidelines are only discussed for Alternative 4. We believe that the final EIS should clearly state that the GIG requirements would apply to all of the alternatives. Also, in impaired areas or areas where conditions are not properly functioning, we recommend that the more stringent GIG thresholds (percent forage utilization) be applied. The final EIS should also include a list or table clearly identifying the guidelines or any deviations from the GIG. Where deviations occur, we recommend a narrative discussion of how deviations would accomplish the goal to improve the watershed and meet desired future conditions.

#### Rotation and Timing

As stated above, the GIG includes specific monitoring thresholds to determine when livestock should be moved from an area. During our July site visit, we viewed an allotment adjacent to the "Pine Plantation Area" where declining riparian areas had been observed. In response, adaptive management principles were employed and livestock were moved more rapidly from this area. In response, riparian conditions showed significant improvements. We encourage the USFS to broaden the use of adaptive management across allotments and consider moving livestock based on monitoring results rather than solely on specific lengths of time (May through mid-October). This will allow flexibility in forest management to more readily meet DFCs (e.g., during drought years).

#### **Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (seeps and springs):**

The DEIS references a partial groundwater dependent ecosystem inventory completed at forty sites. The partial inventory includes photographs and notes disturbances at the sites. The Forest Service identified areas where livestock grazing has degraded GDEs. The DEIS states that actions required to improve GDEs are listed for the action alternatives. However, the DEIS does not seem to include this section nor are GDE measures included in the table comparing alternatives. We recommend that the final EIS clearly identify measures in alternatives that would protect seeps and springs.

#### **SPECIFIC COMMENTS:**

##### Chapter 2

- The DEIS identifies issues as either significant issues that are directly or indirectly caused by implementing an alternative or non-significant issues that are outside of the scope or already decided by other higher level decision (law, regulation, Forest Plan). The DEIS states that, "During scoping, aspen health/decline was raised as a concern. Specifically, that browsing by

domestic ungulates was contributing to the decline of aspen on the district.” Furthermore, “Livestock tend to congregate in Aspen stands, especially in riparian areas, potentially resulting in overuse of suckers and excessive trampling in the stand.” However, alternative measures were not developed to address the issue of grazing management to protect aspen. The DEIS states that aspen has a downward trend, although monitoring has shown adequate regeneration. However, this may not be sufficient to protect sensitive stands and soil compaction and riparian degradation could remain. The DEIS should include specific measures that would be implemented to protect sensitive habitats, including aspen stands.

- Page 16. Table 2-1, 2-2. These tables list upland and riparian forage utilization monitoring parameters, but the text does not discuss or explain the tables. It appears as though these list a range of utilizations, which would be allowed under different riparian and upland settings. The final EIS should explain the contents of the tables, and how they are intended to be used within the different alternatives.
- Page 17. Management objectives common to all alternatives. The percentages for substrate fines are listed as management objectives, and a target of  $\leq 25\%$  is identified. The objective is to reduce fines to  $< 25\%$  by 2020 in streams where fines currently are  $>40\%$ , and to maintain streams with fines currently less than 25 %. However, there is no objective stated for streams with fine sediment in the 25% -  $< 40\%$  range. We recommend including an objective to also reduce sediment in these streams to  $\leq 25\%$ .
- Page 32. The draft 2012 Idaho Integrated Report was finalized in January 2014 and is available at the following link. We recommend updating the EIS using the current report:  
<http://www.deq.idaho.gov/media/1117323/integrated-report-2012-final-entire.pdf>

#### Chapter 4

- Page 66. In describing the direct effects of livestock grazing on water resources, we recommend modifying the following sentence in the second paragraph as follows:  
“Direct effects include the removal of overhanging vegetation, ~~and the~~ trampling of streambanks, and direct addition of pathogens and nutrients including nitrogen and phosphorus.”
- Page 68. Cumulative effects of Alternatives 2, 3 and 4. Regarding cumulative effects on water resources of these three alternatives, the draft EIS indicates that all alternatives would “maintain and slightly improve water quality” within 10 – 15 years. Given that Table 3-2 lists 13 stream segments, which are currently impaired (303(d) listed) and do not meet water quality standards, we are concerned about the stated pace of improvement. The Caribou National Forest Riparian Grazing Implementation Guide, Version 1-2<sup>1</sup> references 303(d) listed streams and their implications on pp. 39 and 44. For example, from p. 44:  
*“...However, socio-political factors, such as the presence of threatened or endangered species, or listing of the streams under section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act may warrant additional protection or accelerated restoration. As such, more restrictive standards may be justified than those advocated within the tables. For example, Forest Service Handbook 2209.21 (1993) states that stubble heights of greater than 6 inches may be necessary to protect special riparian*

<sup>1</sup> Caribou National Forest Riparian Grazing Implementation Guide Version 1-2. Caribou- Targhee National Forest. December 28, 2005.

*ecosystem functions, such as critical fisheries. FSHY 2209.21 further states that where riparian and fishery habitats as well as other sensitive areas are involved, grazing animals must be totally removed from the grazing unit when proper use has been attained."*

- Given that numerous 303(d) listed streams occur in all allotments, and that sensitive fisheries exist (Yellowstone cutthroat), we believe the EIS should more actively discuss these issues, include an objective to comply with water quality standards within the revised RMP timeframe, and establish more stringent forage utilization and bank alteration standards to implement these goals.

#### APPENDIX A- Draft Allotment Management Plan

- Page 101. Suggest editing the following Riparian and Aquatic Resource Desired Condition: ~~Public waters~~ Waterbodies are restored where water quality does not support beneficial uses and otherwise are maintained or improved (RFP 4-47).
- Page 102. Management objectives. We agree with the five overall management objectives. However, we are concerned with the lack of a general management objective regarding protecting and restoring water resources. Given the significant water resource issues within the scope of the allotment, we believe it is important to have a management objective focused on improving riparian and aquatic resources.
- Page 107. GIG Riparian Forage Utilization Standards. We suggest that these DMA specific standards be carefully reviewed to identify those DMAs where waterbodies are impaired, or contribute to downstream impaired segments. In these areas, if livestock grazing is not excluded, we recommend utilizing standards which reflect reduced grazing, (e.g., "functioning at risk or nonfunctioning" utilization standards in the GIG) in order to more rapidly improve riparian function and water quality.

#### OTHER

- Comparison of Alternatives. The Table in the Executive summary should include the potential number of livestock grazing that would be permitted (e.g., Alternative 2, 5,941 maximum head months) in order to clearly compare and contrast alternatives.
- Tables S-4 and 2-3. Comparison on Alternatives. Under Alternative 3 the "Municipal Watershed" column lists "Up to 1,711 acres = 38%". However, there is another measure directly underneath this estimate "Up to 3,368 acres", which seems to be misplaced. Please correct the table or define how these two measures could be applied together.
- References. The DEIS does not include a list of references cited in the document. The final EIS should include a list of references (i.e., Higginson 2010).
- Maps and Figures. The maps and alternative figures are very difficult to decipher. The small scale makes it challenging to identify allotments, streams and key management areas. We request that the final EIS include maps and figures that are more clearly visible.

- Glossary and List of Acronyms. The EIS does not include a glossary of terms or a list of acronyms. Both of these sections would aid in reviewing the document. For example, we are unclear how head months are measured versus animal unit measurement.
- Pages 32, 36, 37 include error statements, "Error! Reference source not found." We are unclear if there is missing information that should have been included or if this statement is due to a minor editorial. Please correct and include any relevant missing information.